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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes key findings from a 1999 nationwide poll regarding support and demand for after-school programs. Participating in the poll were 1,100 adults over age 18 who are registered to vote, and an oversample of 100 parents of school-age children. The findings indicated that 92 percent of respondents agreed that there should be an organized activity/place for children and teens after school every day; over 80 percent believed that after-school programs are a necessity. Support was strong among both parents and nonparents and crossed partisan lines. After hearing a description of an after-school program, respondents overwhelmingly favored a program that would take place from 3:00 to 6:00 P.M., 5 days a week, and that would provide fun, enriching learning opportunities extending beyond schools' traditional academic style. School districts and parents' groups were identified as those responsible for setting up after-school programs. Knowing such programs would cost $1,000 per child per school year, 66 percent of respondents were still willing to use additional federal or state taxpayer money to make daily after-school programs accessible to all children. Two-thirds of the respondents did not think there are enough after-school programs available. Over 70 percent thought expanding after-school programs was an issue that should be addressed by businesses in the community. The characteristics considered by respondents to be important for after-school programs include a safe place in which to learn and tutoring and homework help. (KB)

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Poll Report
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AFTERSCHOOL POLL REPORT

January 2000

Afterschool Alliance

A Report of Findings from the 1999 Mott Foundation/JCPenney Nationwide Survey on Afterschool Programs

Why are afterschool programs so important?
Because children's minds don't close down at 3:00 p.m., and neither should their schools.
— Richard W. Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education

The Case for Afterschool

Background

Over 28 million school-age children have either their only parent or both their parents working outside the home.

— U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997

Once the three o'clock bell rings, millons of America's children have nowhere to go. These latchkey children are at significant risk of getting poor grades, being victims of crime, or participating in anti-social behaviors that have grave consequences and costs for society. Millions of working parents watch that same clock, worrying whether their children are safe, wondering whether their children are gaining ground, or losing it, during the hours after school.

Key Findings Show Universal Support

Increasingly, studies show that afterschool programs can make a difference. A nationwide poll conducted in 1999 by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and JCPenney shows that record numbers of American voters believe that afterschool programs are a fundamental part of youth development. More than nine out of ten Americans consistently voiced their support for quality, accessible afterschool programs that would keep kids safe, help working families and improve academic performance. And the intensity with which Americans voice this support is notably high:

- An overwhelming majority of voters (92%) say that there should be some type of organized activity or place for children and teens to go after school every day. Seventy-one percent (71%) of that majority **strongly** agree.
- Not only do voters think there is a need for an organized activity, they believe afterschool programs are a necessity (86%). Fifty-nine percent (59%) of that majority **strongly** believe this.
- Voters also say it is important to them personally to ensure access to afterschool programs for **all** children (91%). Fifty-five percent (55%) of that majority say it is **very important.**
- Voters overwhelmingly (90%) favor providing a program which takes place during after school hours five days a week from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., that provides children with fun, enriching learning opportunities that extend beyond schools' traditional academic style, that challenges them, and that gives them more individualized attention. Fifty-five percent (55%) of that majority **strongly** favor providing such a program to **all** children.

And yet demand for afterschool programs far outpaces supply. This Poll Report summarizes key findings from the Mott/JCPenney nationwide survey and provides key messages useful in closing the gap between the voting public's will and everyday reality.

The findings discussed in this publication are based on a nationwide poll among 1,100 adults, 18 years of age or older, who are registered to vote, including an oversample of 100 parents of school-age children. The survey was conducted between July 27–29, 1999 by the polling firms of Lake Snell Perry & Associates and The Tarrance Group. The margin of error for this survey is +/–3.1 percent.

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Background

Violent crimes by juveniles — murder, violent sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault — peak between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., the hour at the end of the school day. The rate of juvenile violence during the afterschool period from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. is four times the rate during standard curfew hours of 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

— National Center for Juvenile Justice, 1999

The Need

Support Crosses Time, Gender, Political ID

In 1998, the Mott Foundation conducted a similar poll on afterschool programs, asking whether respondents agreed there was a need for some type of organized activity during after school hours. One year later, the overall level of support has not changed.

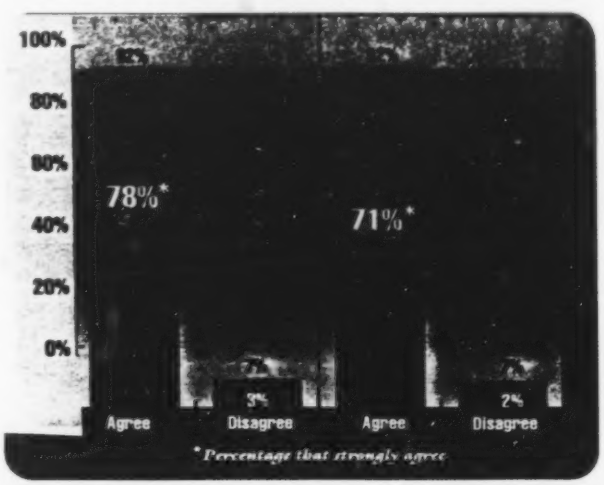
This continued high level of interest reflects another concern of more than a third of respondents — the biggest problem facing children today is that they are alone and unsupervised. Between 1998 and 1999, the level of concern rose from 26% to 35%. And there is no difference between parents and nonparents on this issue.

Support for providing an organized activity is strong among both parents (94%) and nonparents (91%), as well as among both genders of parents: mothers (94%), fathers (92%).

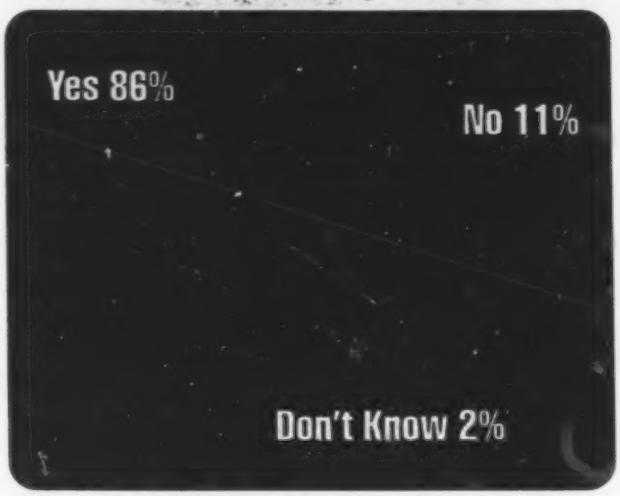
Agreement crosses partisan lines with 94% of Democrats, 93% of Independents and 89% of Republicans agreeing that there should be some type of organized activity after school.

Significantly, "expanding quality afterschool programs" is considered by respondents among the top four elements needed to improve the performance of students, along with getting parents involved in schools, requiring tougher academic standards and reducing class size.

Level of agreement among respondents on need for organized activity or place for children and teens after school every day (in 1998 the words "every day" were not used)



Voters who believe afterschool programs are a necessity



Voters Take Afterschool to Heart

Not only do voters think there is a need for an organized activity, but more than eight out of ten voters (86%) believe afterschool programs are a necessity.

At least three-quarters of voters in every demographic subgroup feel afterschool programs are a necessity, including nearly half in every subgroup who feel strongly about this. Seniors (ages 65 and over) also see these programs as a necessity (86% yes).

Voters also say it is personally important to them to ensure access to afterschool programs for all children (90%).

✎ *The public does not consider afterschool programs to be "add-on's."*

"What is most significant to me is how this poll shows that, across time, demographic groups, party lines and geographic regions, overall support for afterschool programs among the American public has remained strong. Equally significant is how the intensity level of that support — those people who say they 'strongly' support afterschool programs — has remained just about as high from last year to this year."

Alysia Snell, Senior Vice President, Lake Snell Perry & Associates (Polling Firm, 1999 Mott/JCPenney Afterschool Survey)

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Background

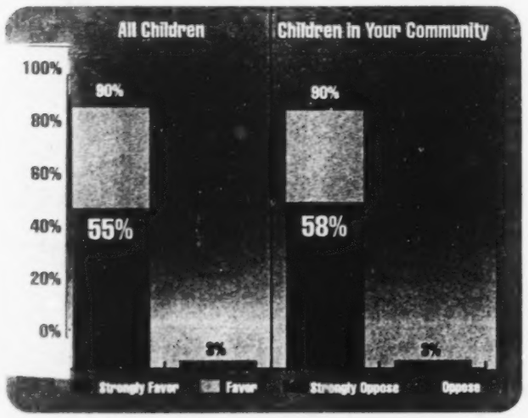
Students involved in afterschool programs exhibit fewer behavioral problems, better ability to handle conflicts, and improved self-confidence.

—Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids, *U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 1998*

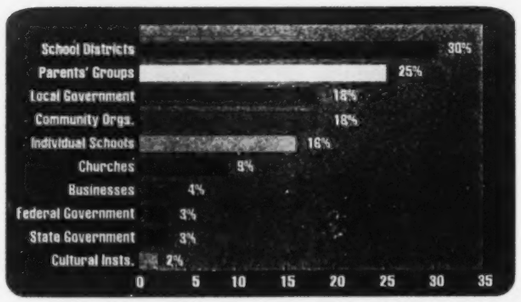
Nearly half of American voters (46%) believe schools should be responsible for setting up afterschool programs, with 30% believing school districts should be responsible and 16% believing individual schools should be responsible.

— Mott Foundation/JCPenney Afterschool Poll, 1999

Respondents' support for daily afterschool programs nationwide and in their communities



Responsibility for setting up afterschool programs



Key Messages

- **Across time, demographic groups, party lines and geographic regions, support for afterschool programs remains overwhelmingly strong.**
- **Nine out of ten voting Americans–parents and nonparents alike–want afterschool programs for our youth.**
- **And they want it available to all kids, every day.**
- **Americans believe afterschool programs keep kids safe, help working families and improve academic success.**
- **Americans believe the most important roles afterschool programs can play are keeping kids safe, providing tutoring and homework help, providing structured adult supervision, teaching respect for other people, teaching ways to resolve conflict, and helping kids to set goals.**
- **Americans agree that there are not enough afterschool programs.**
- **Americans are ready to pay for afterschool programs.**

— Mott Foundation/JCPenney Nationwide Survey on Afterschool Programs, 1999

The Program

Strong Support for Daily, Enriching Programs

After hearing a description of an afterschool program, voters overwhelmingly favor a program that would take place during after school hours, five days a week from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., that provides children with fun, enriching learning opportunities that extend beyond schools' traditional academic style. They also favor providing this program to children in their community as well as to all children.

Afterschool is an issue that crosses geographic boundaries. Voters support programs not only for children in their own communities, but also for children they don't know in towns and cities across the nation.

Setting Up Afterschool Programs

Schools Move from Fourth to First

When the American public is asked who is responsible for setting up afterschool programs in their communities, "school districts" come out on top. The first place (30%) position for school districts in the 1999 poll compares with fourth place (20%) in 1998 — an increase of ten percent.

There is also little or no difference among parents with children and voters without children under the age of 18 on this issue. Both parents and non-parents ranked "school districts" first and "parents' groups" second. However, parents are slightly more mobilized (32%) than non-parents (28%) about having school districts be responsible for setting up afterschool programs.

Paying for Afterschool Programs

Cost Not a Major Deterrent

Not surprisingly, when poll respondents were introduced to the financial consequences of providing afterschool programs for every child, the level of support declined. However, not by as much as expected. At a cost of $1,000 per child per school year, two-thirds of voters (66%) are still willing to use additional federal or state taxpayer money to make daily afterschool programs accessible to all children.

Support crosses partisan lines with Democrats (70%) and Independents (72%) most willing to pay for nationwide programs, and 62% of Republicans expressing willingness to pay.

Seventy-one percent (71%) of voters think expanding afterschool programs is an issue that should be addressed by businesses in their communities. A quarter of voters do not think this is an issue for businesses.

Background

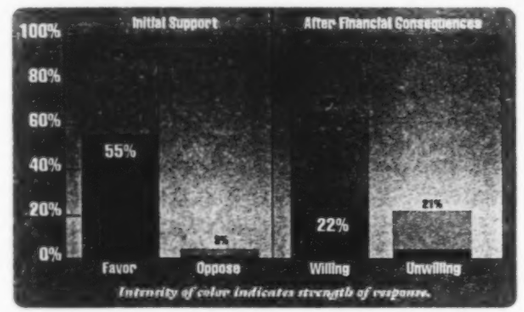
In an August 1999 poll conducted by "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids," respondents were asked to identify priorities they considered more important than cutting taxes. Sixty-six percent (66%) chose "providing access to afterschool programs and early childhood development programs like Head Start" as more important — just one percentage point behind "shoring up Social Security and Medicare" (67%). The next closest item, at a relatively distant 48%, was "paying off the debt."

— Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, August 1999

While 74% of elementary and middle school parents say they'd be willing to pay for school-based afterschool programs, only about 31% of primary school parents and 39% of middle school parents report their children actually attend an afterschool program at school.

— National Opinion Research Center, 1998

Willingness to use additional taxpayer dollars



"With all the work our firm does on children's issues, I've seen it happen many times. As soon as you introduce the financial consequences of providing new or expanded programs, the level of public support takes a nosedive. However, in this poll, we experienced very little erosion when we asked the public if they'd be willing to commit more taxpayer dollars — $1,000 per child — to pay for afterschool programs. I felt that to be actually the most exciting finding from the entire poll."

David Sackett, Partner, The Tarrance Group (Polling Firm, 1999 Mott/JCPenney Afterschool Survey)

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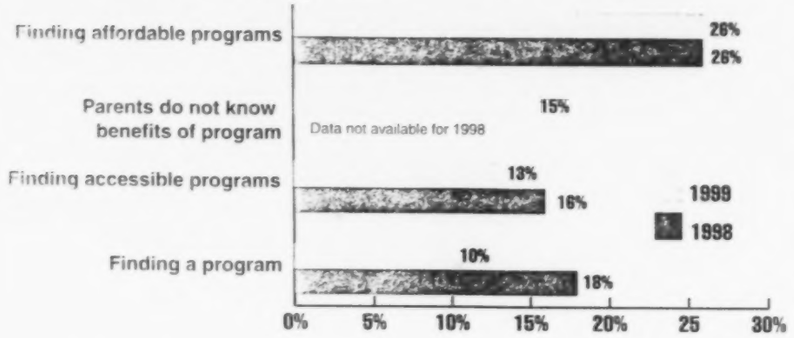
Availability

Access and Affordability Are Key Issues

Two-thirds of voters do not think there are enough afterschool programs available for children in America today. Most voters also think it is difficult to find afterschool programs — either in the nation or in their own communities. And when asked to think about the problems facing parents when it comes to afterschool programs, voters are most likely to mention cost — a statistic that has not changed since 1998.

The biggest problems facing parents when it comes to afterschool programs



Activities and Outcomes

Academic/Social Skills High on List

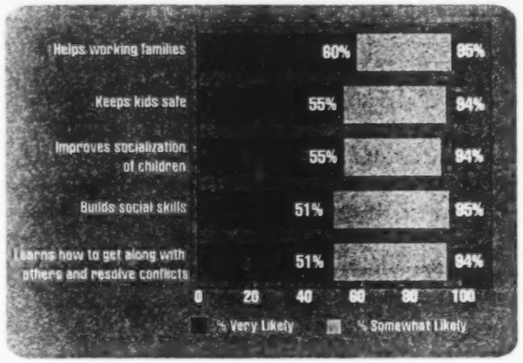
What do poll respondents believe a child should be able to do once he or she arrives at an afterschool program?

- Have a safe place in which to learn (93%)
- Receive tutoring and homework help (88%)
- Learn respect for people different than themselves (87%)
- Receive structured, adult supervision (87%)
- Learn ways to resolve conflicts with other young people (86%)
- Learn to set goals (85%)
- Learn and master new skills (83%)
- Have basic skills reinforced (81%)
- Learn computer skills (77%)

Other activities ranked by respondents included having opportunities for a creative outlet, community service, athletic activities, theater, art, music and dance.

And what does the public think is most likely to result from an afterschool program? Reflecting the nation's ongoing quest to balance work and family, "helping working families" surfaced as number one among the items listed, followed by "keeping kids safe" and "improving socialization and conflict resolution skills."

Top five items likely to result from afterschool programs



For the second year, the greatest numbers of voters believe that working families are very likely to benefit from children attending afterschool programs.

Background

Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 49% more likely to have used drugs and 37% more likely to become teen parents than are those students who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities.

—U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995

High school students who take part in afterschool activities exhibit more positive feelings and attitudes toward the pressures of teen life and are willing to share their talents with the community.

— The Shell Education Poll, 1999

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Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is an emerging alliance of public, private and nonprofit groups committed to raising awareness and expanding resources for afterschool programs. Initiated and currently coordinated by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Alliance grew out of a partnership between the Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. Initial partners are:

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
The U.S. Department of Education
JCPenney
The Advertising Council
The Entertainment Industry Foundation
The Creative Artists Agency Foundation
People Magazine

The vision of the Afterschool Alliance is to ensure that every child in America has access to quality afterschool programs by the year 2010 by raising national and local awareness about the importance of afterschool. Through its role as a national information resource, the Alliance will conduct and publish research measuring the progress of afterschool, from trends in public attitudes to accessibility of programs and growth in funding. A three-year national public service announcement (PSA) campaign will be launched this year. This fall, the Alliance will inaugurate "Lights On!," an annual event encouraging communities across the nation to turn on lights in facilities normally closed after school hours.

To Find Out More:

202-296-9378
www.mott.org
www.ed.gov/21stcclc

Common Elements of High-Quality Afterschool Programs for School-Age Children

- Goal setting and strong management
- Quality staffing
- Low staff/participant ratios
- Attention to safety, health and nutrition issues
- Appropriate environments with adequate space and materials
- Effective partnerships between parents and volunteers, schools, community-based organizations, juvenile justice agencies, law enforcement, youth serving agencies, business leaders, community colleges, etc.
- Strong family involvement
- Coordinating learning with the regular school day
- Links between school-day teachers and afterschool staff
- Evaluation of program progress and effectiveness
- Activity choices to provide diverse educational enrichment opportunities
- Plans for sustainability

Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids, *U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice*

CHARLES STEWART
MOTT FOUNDATION

The Mott Foundation was established in 1926 to support efforts promoting a just, equitable and sustainable society. During more than 65 years of funding community education, Mott has provided more than $200 million locally, nationally and internationally for the development of community-school partnerships. Mott has committed more than $83 million over six years to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) afterschool program initiative for training, technical assistance, evaluation and raising public awareness.

The U.S. Department of Education's CCLC initiative was created to fund local communities to create afterschool programs. The fastest growing discretionary grant program in the Department, funding for the 21st CCLC initiative has increased more than elevenfold in three years. For more information on 21st CCLC, and on other Department programs, research and publications, call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

JCPenney AFTERSCHOOL
THE "CAN DO" SOLUTION

With a 97-year history of supporting education and families, JCPenney has made a multi-year, $30 million dollar commitment to increase the number of high quality, affordable afterschool programs in communities through the JCPenney Afterschool Initiative. This new initiative is a partnership between JCPenney, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the YMCA, public schools nationwide, and the Afterschool Alliance. One of America's largest department store, drugstore, catalog and e-commerce retailers, JCPenney operates nearly 1,150 stores in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Mexico, and owns Eckerd Drugstores and its 2,900 locations.

To learn more, go to:

www.jcpenney.net/company/cando

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